CIRCUS TRAINS

Trains Album of Photographs Number 19

CIRCUS TRAINS

Book 19 Trains Album of Railroad Photographs

Photographs and Text by CHARLES PHILIP FOX

"The Greatest Show on Earth" started traveling by railroad in the spring of 1872, when the Barnum & Bailey Circus became the first show to move from city to city by train. It was at the insistence of W. C. Coup, general manager of the circus, that travel by rail came about. One of the big things that resulted, due to the tremendous carrying capacity of the railroad, was the first three-ring circus. The show became bigger and better than ever.

On a circus train, special flat cars are used to handle the heavily loaded wagons quickly and efficiently. Stock cars are also specially designed to carry elephants, camels, zebras, and several hundred horses. Colorful passenger cars are fitted for the performers and crew.

The "Big One," as it is called by the press and radio, travels on 100 cars, which the circus owns — enough to make four complete trains. These cars are all 70 feet long, nearly twice as long as the ordinary box car. Put end to end, they make a train nearly 1½ miles in length. Locomotives, cabooses, and train crews are furnished by each of the 50 railroads the circus travels upon as it goes from city to city all over the country.

The following pages illustrate how "The Greatest Show on Earth" moves about from one city to another in a single night, and how in only a few hours it explodes from tightly packed wagons on railroad cars into a spectacular array of entertainment.

Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus is, and always has been, the largest circus in the entire world.

Kalmbach Publishing Co.
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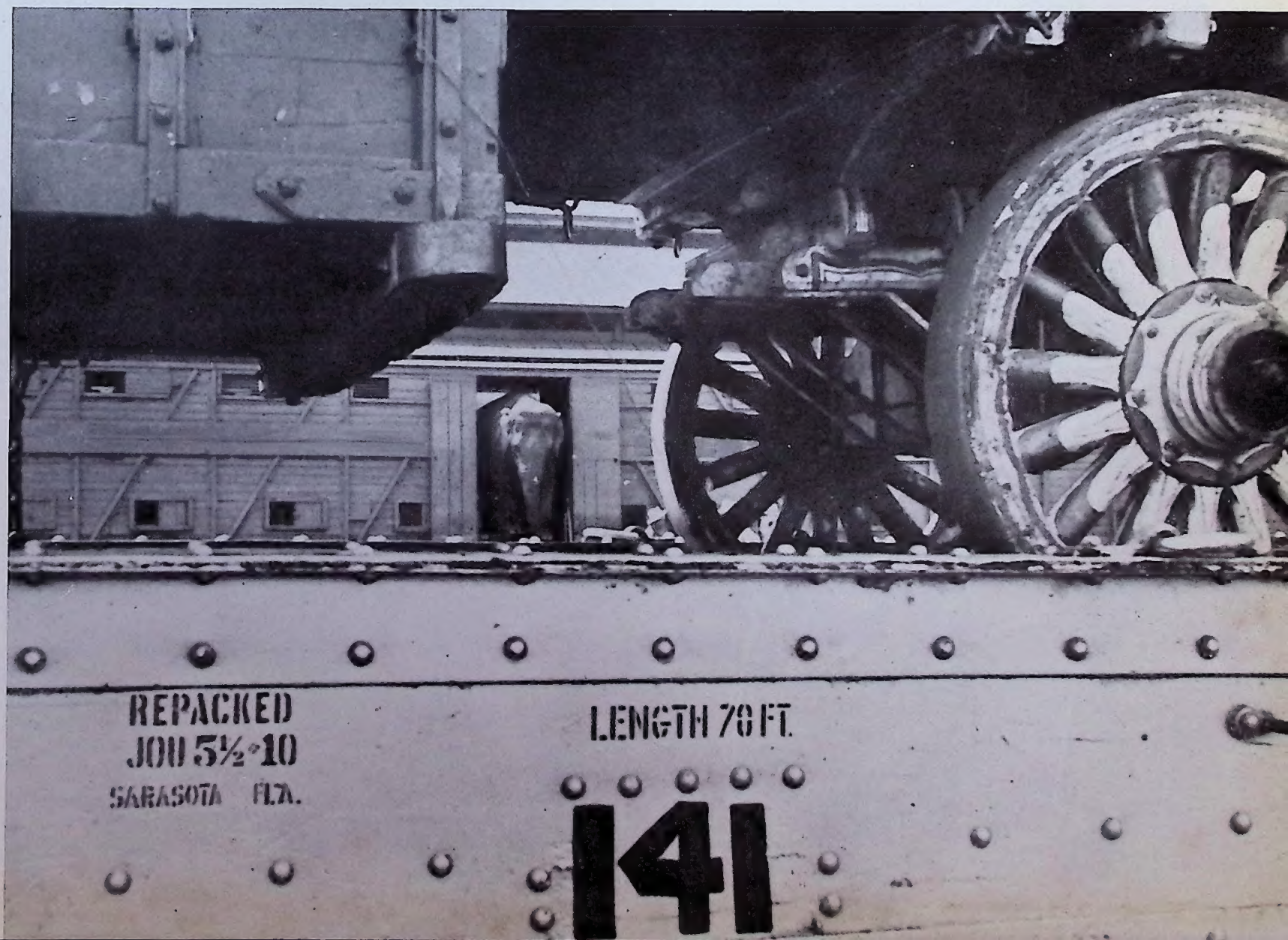

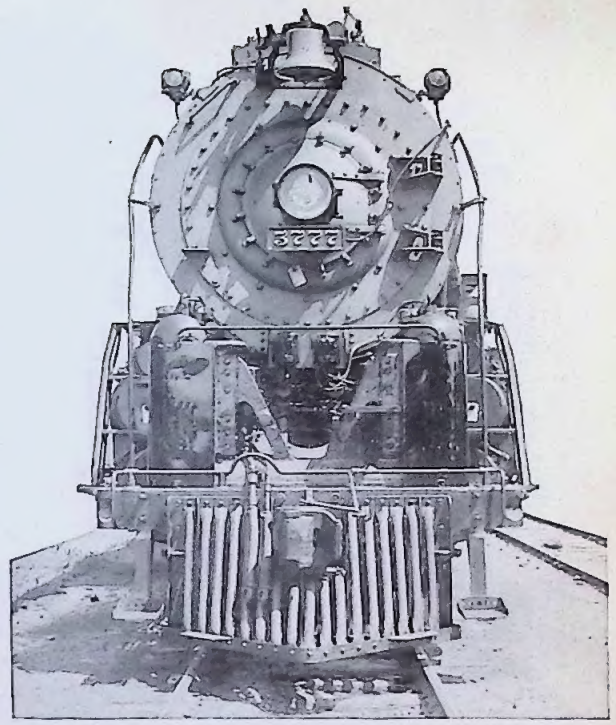

The famous Bell Wagon has been with Ringling Bros. since it was built in 1892. Its music has thrilled people in the streets of hundreds of cities all over the United States, Canada, and Europe. The eight bronze bells are giants compared to those on engines which pull circus trains.

TRAINS ALBUMS OF RAILROAD PHOTOGRAPHS

By the Editors of Trains Magazine

Book 1—Eastern Railroads.
Book 2—Far Western Railroads.
Book 3—Midwestern Railroads.
Book 4—Colorado Railroads.
Book 5—Southern Railroads.
Book 6—New England Railroads.
Book 7—Electric Railways.
Book 8—Pennsylvania Railroad.
Book 9—New York Central Railroad.
Book 10—Modern Steam Locomotives.
Book 11—Southern Pacific Lines.
Book 12—Santa Fe Railway.
Book 13—Baltimore & Ohio Railroad.
Book 14—Erie Railroad.
Book 15—Great Northern Railway.
Book 16—The Burlington Route.
Book 19—Circus Trains.

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Three weeks before "The Greatest Show on Earth" is due in town, advertising car No. 1 arrives. It stays as many days as the circus will show in that city while its crew of 25 to 30 men spread out over the city and surrounding suburbs putting up colorful posters, banners, and lithographs. Ten days later car No. 2 slips into town to finish the vast job of informing the public of the circus that is coming.

Circus day arrives, and down the tracks, through the early morning haze, comes the first section of the circus train. It carries the menagerie and the commissary department with its cookhouse equipment and its tent for dining. This part of the circus was torn down and loaded while people were still enjoying the performance in a city miles away the evening before. Because of the tremendously heavy loads, circus trains move at a restricted speed of 35 miles per hour. Longest runs are almost always made over week ends.

The colorful show trains have now reached the outskirts of the city, and crossing signals tell of their passing. Soon the switching locomotives will shunt the cars to sidings where unloading will take place.

An advance agent was in town the day before, making arrangements for extra planking and cinder fill which is necessary to make the ground suitable for unloading the more than 250 circus wagons which carry the wild animals and tons and tons of paraphernalia.

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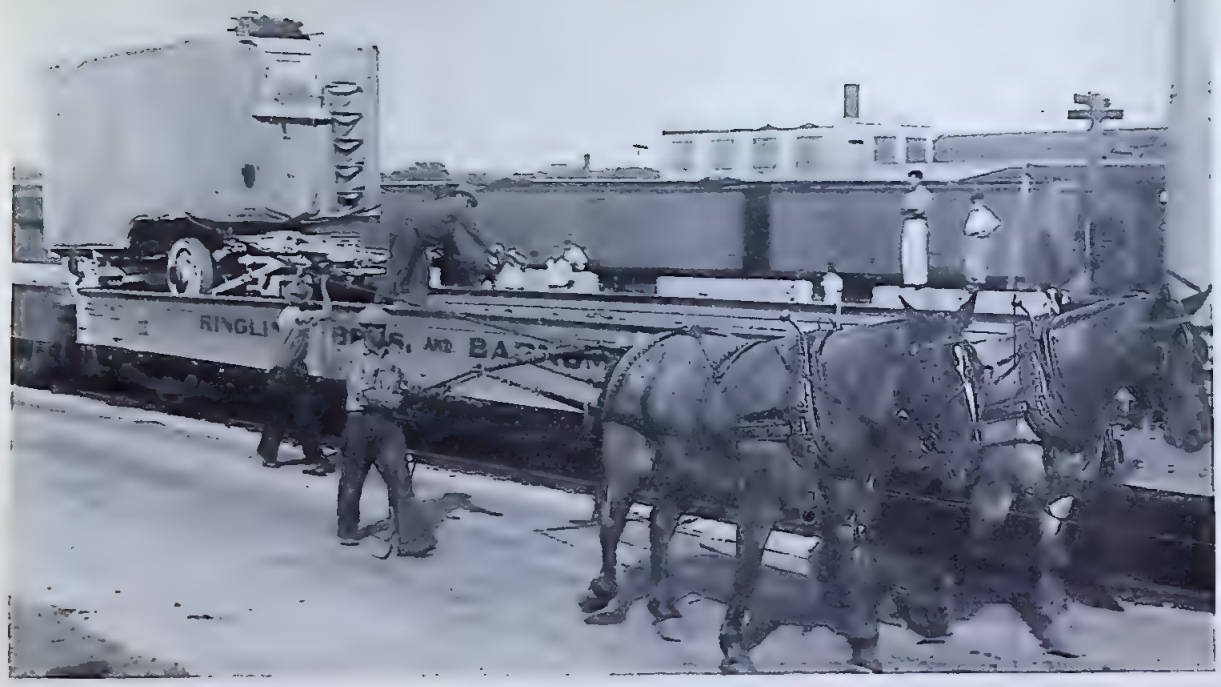
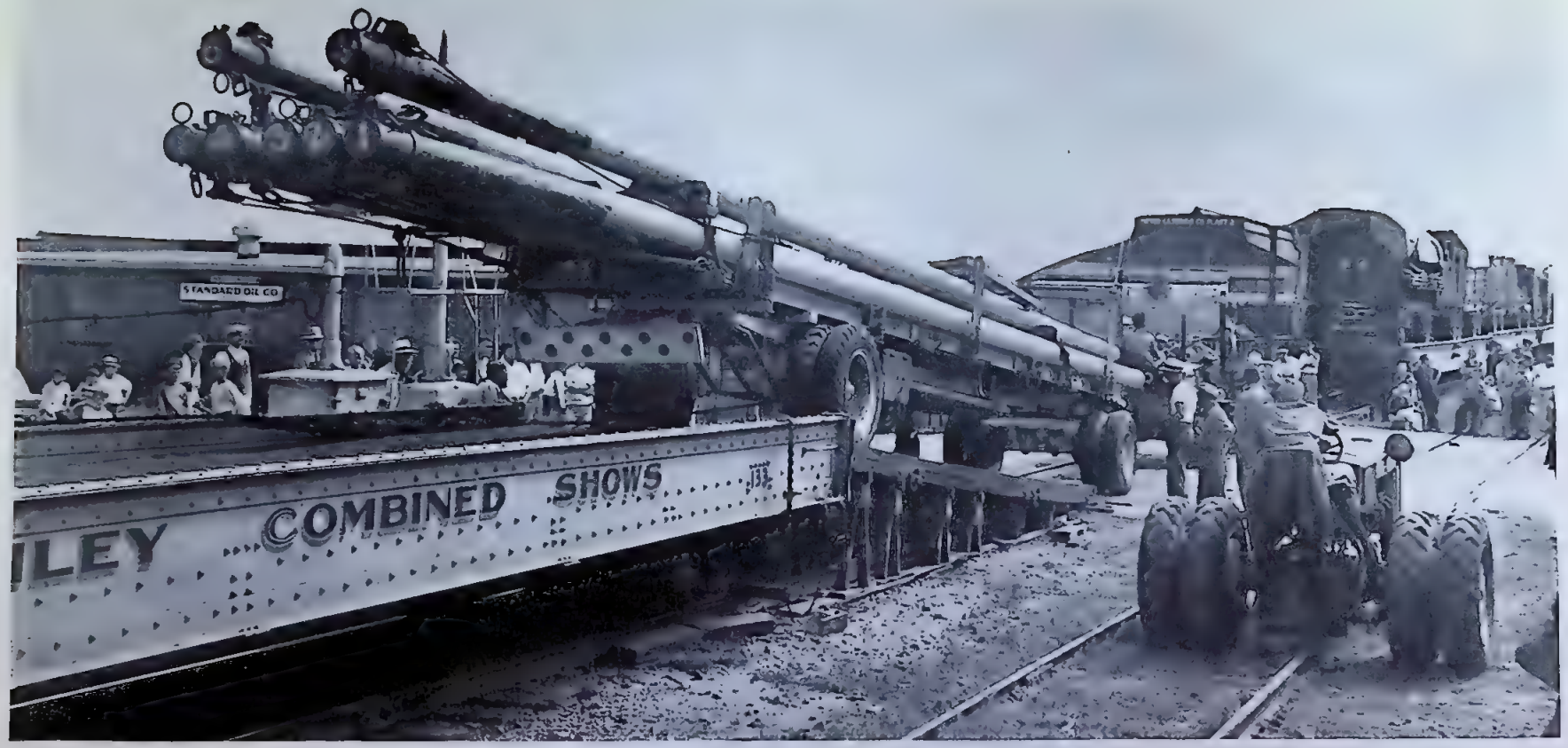
Wagons are blocked and chained to the railroad flat cars to prevent their rolling while en route. At destination, runways are thrown from car to car and the vehicles are moved from one car to the next, finally rolling down a portable ramp at the end of the long train to reach the ground.



Teams of horses↑, sometimes tractors↓, move the wagons along the cars to the edge of the ramps down which the wagons roll↗. Before the descent is made, a snubbing rope is attached to the wagon↘ to prevent it from rolling too rapidly. After they are unloaded, wagons are quickly towed to their allotted space on the circus grounds. There is very little confusion, as it is all well planned in advance. Towing is usually done by high-speed trucks whose rubber tires are cut and torn from contact with railroad tracks and the ends of ties. Sidewalls show more wear than treads.



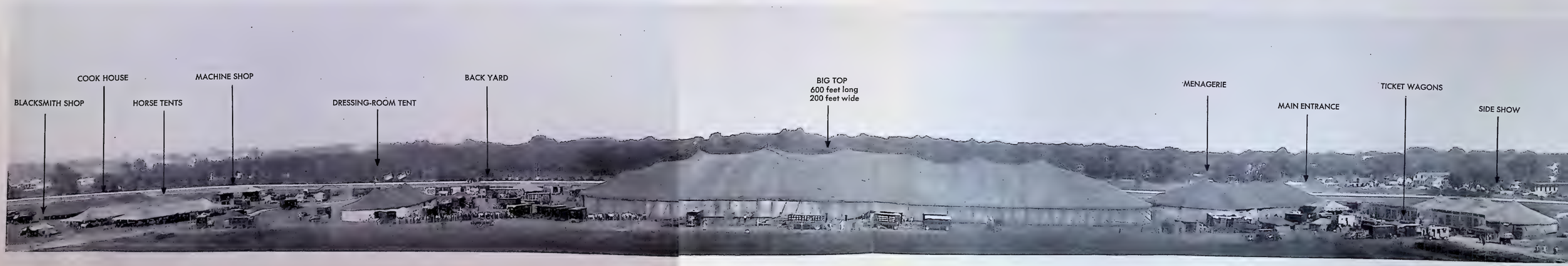
The 65-foot Oregon fir tent poles take up an entire car. The big top uses six of them, and a seventh for a spare.

As the last wagon leaves the long string of flat cars of one train, another train rolls up to the unloading tracks. Reloading is in like fashion.

About midmorning, the commissary in the distance is already serving breakfast. The menagerie tent at left is up, and four of the six poles for the big top are ready. A switching locomotive pulls a long string of unloaded flat cars to a siding for storage near the circus grounds.

The 100-car circus train, traveling in four sections, transports: 45 tents, 1600 people of 15 nationalities and 100 trades, 79 miles of rope, 24,000 feet of electric cable, 15 electric generators, 45 elephants, 300 horses, 8000 folding chairs, 75,000 yards of canvas weighing 35 tons, a complete zoo, a complete restaurant capable of serving 4800 meals daily, tractors, bulldozers, and scores of wagons and trucks containing an endless list of paraphernalia including wardrobe trunks, seats, poles, rings, stakes, guy wires, props, steam generators, etc.

Constantly a source of amazement for most people is the fact that this 15-acre city of canvas, housing 1600 people and ready to entertain 12,000 more with a 2½-hour show twice a day, can be unpacked from a railroad train and set up for use in just a few hours. The real miracle is that all these poles, canvas, rigging, stakes, wagons, seats, wild animals, horses, props, and performers will be repacked and set up in another city, 175 miles away, by tomorrow afternoon, ready to entertain another 12,000 eager spectators with "The Greatest Show on Earth."



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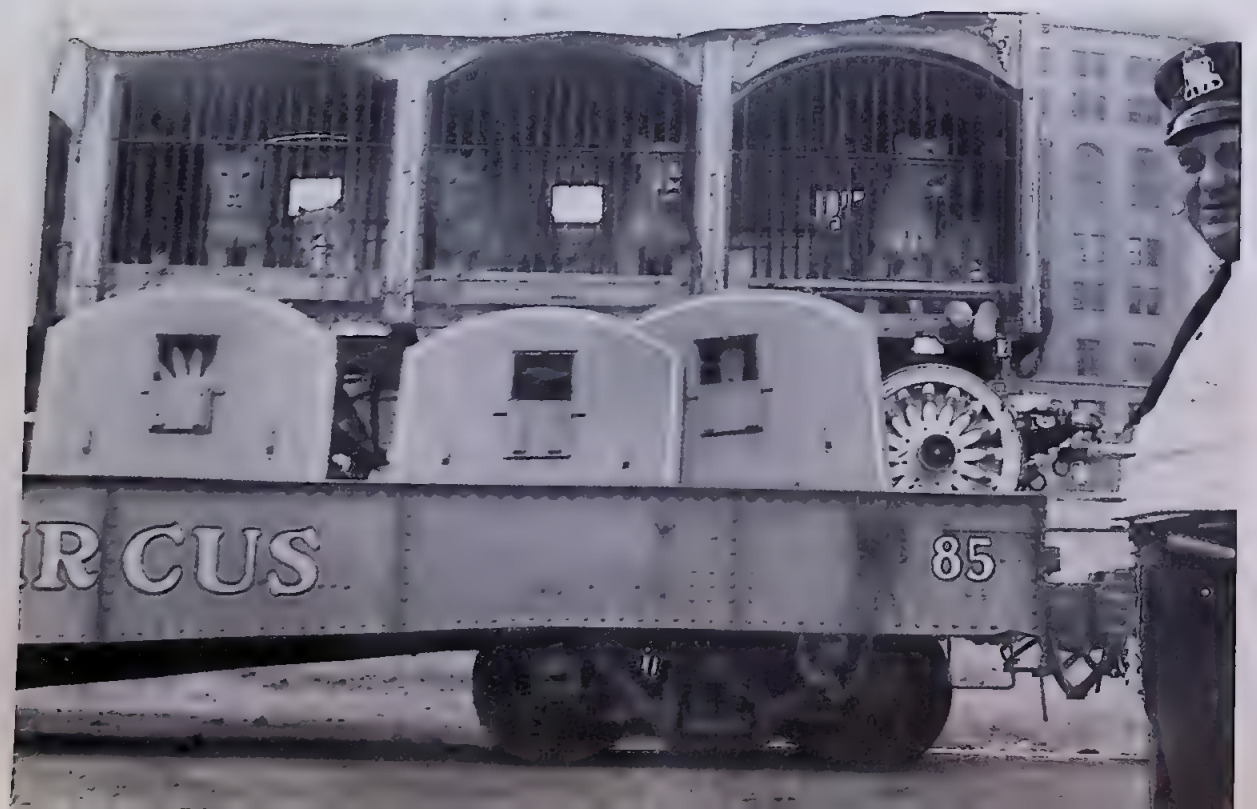
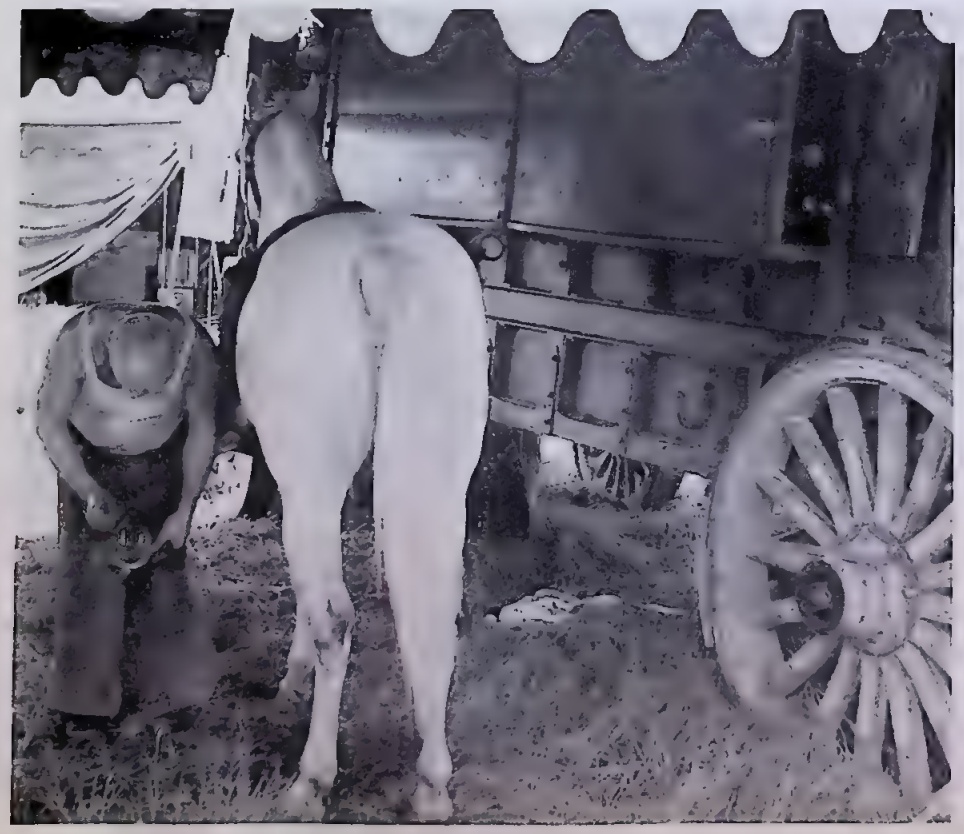
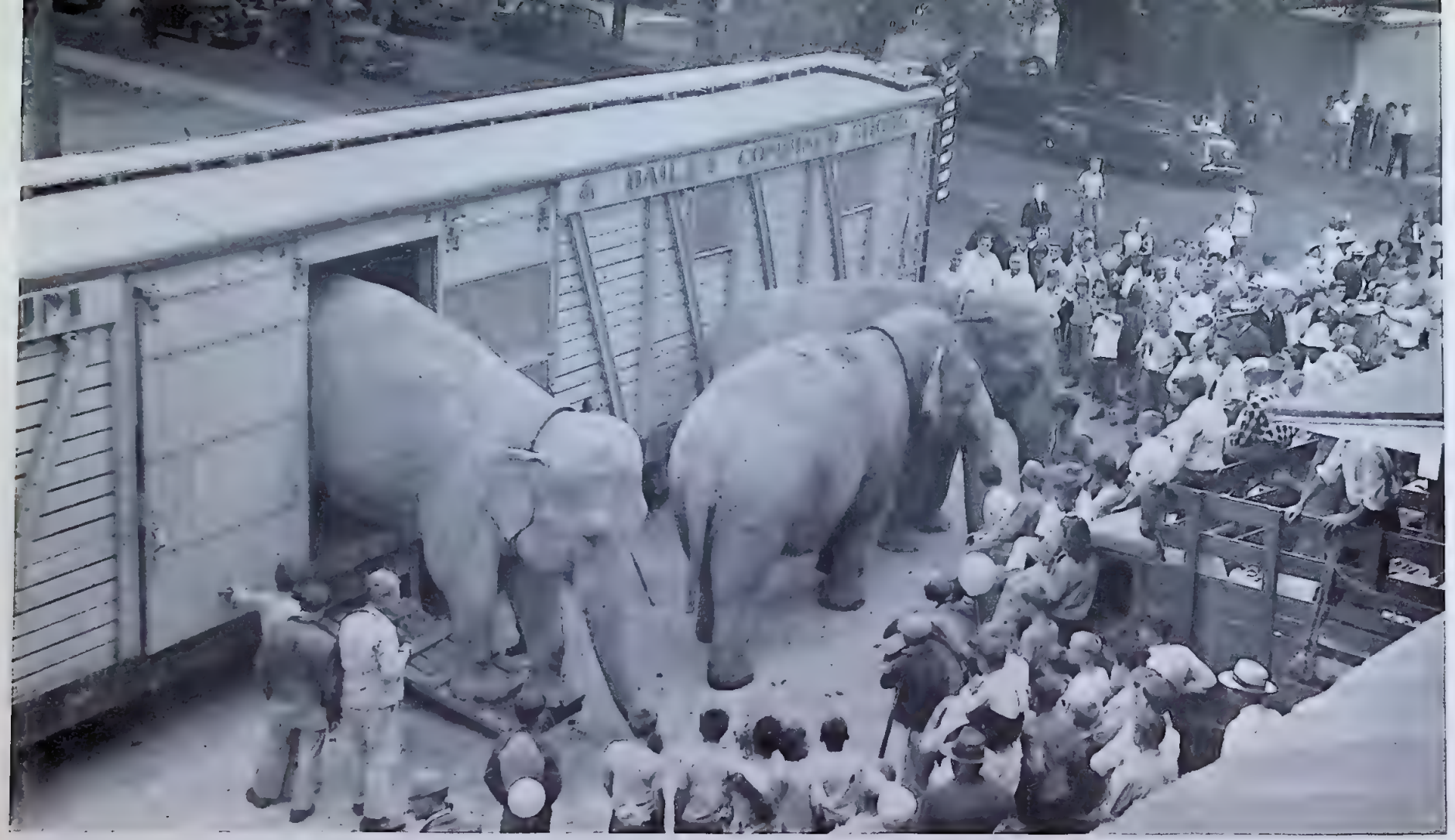
When the circus makes an extra long jump, such as from Sarasota, Fla., to New York City, it is necessary to stop en route to feed and water the animals. Here six lionesses enjoy a bit of fresh air.



The problem of carrying 18-foot giraffes around the country is solved by using a specially constructed wagon which the elephants are pulling into the menagerie. It has a very low body and is extra long to accommodate the animal's long neck. Heavy padding protects the giraffe from bruises. Only one giraffe is transported in each wagon, and the frames of his portable cage are carried in a sling on the side of the vehicle. In designing the giraffe wagon it was necessary to consider tunnel and bridge clearances.

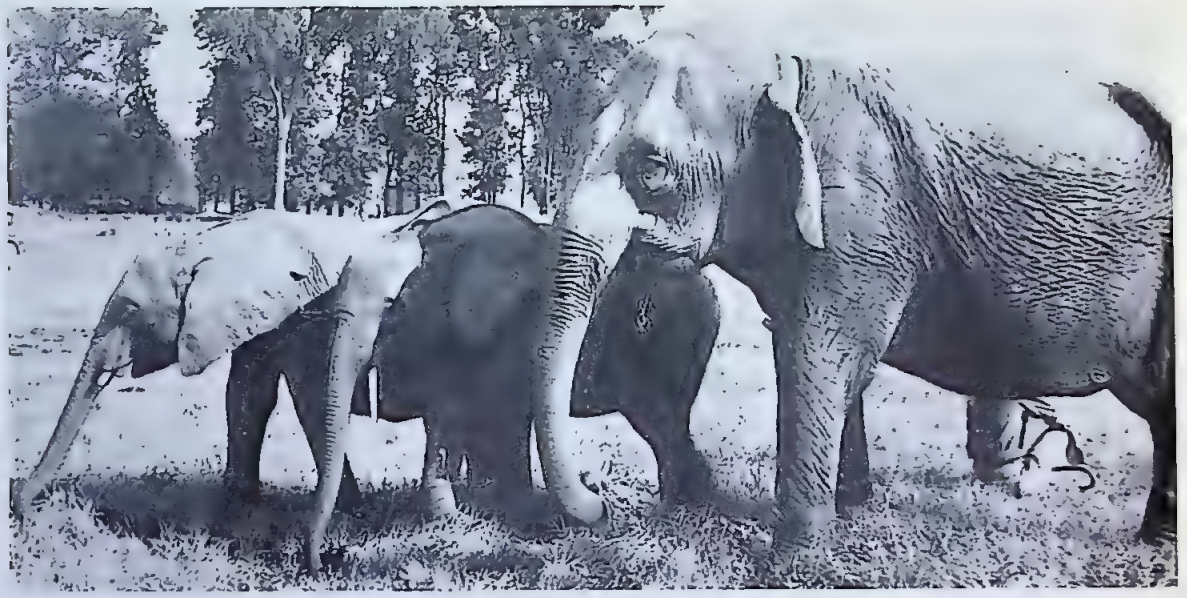
A circus is not a circus without horses; the "Big Show" has hundreds. Here the "ring stock," as the performing horses are called, is being taken out of the stock cars↗. The steeds are tied to the sides of the cars until the horse tents are erected on the lot. The circus blacksmith↓ fits a new shoe to a beautifully groomed horse. Four dappled gray Percherons pull a gilded chariot→ into the tent.



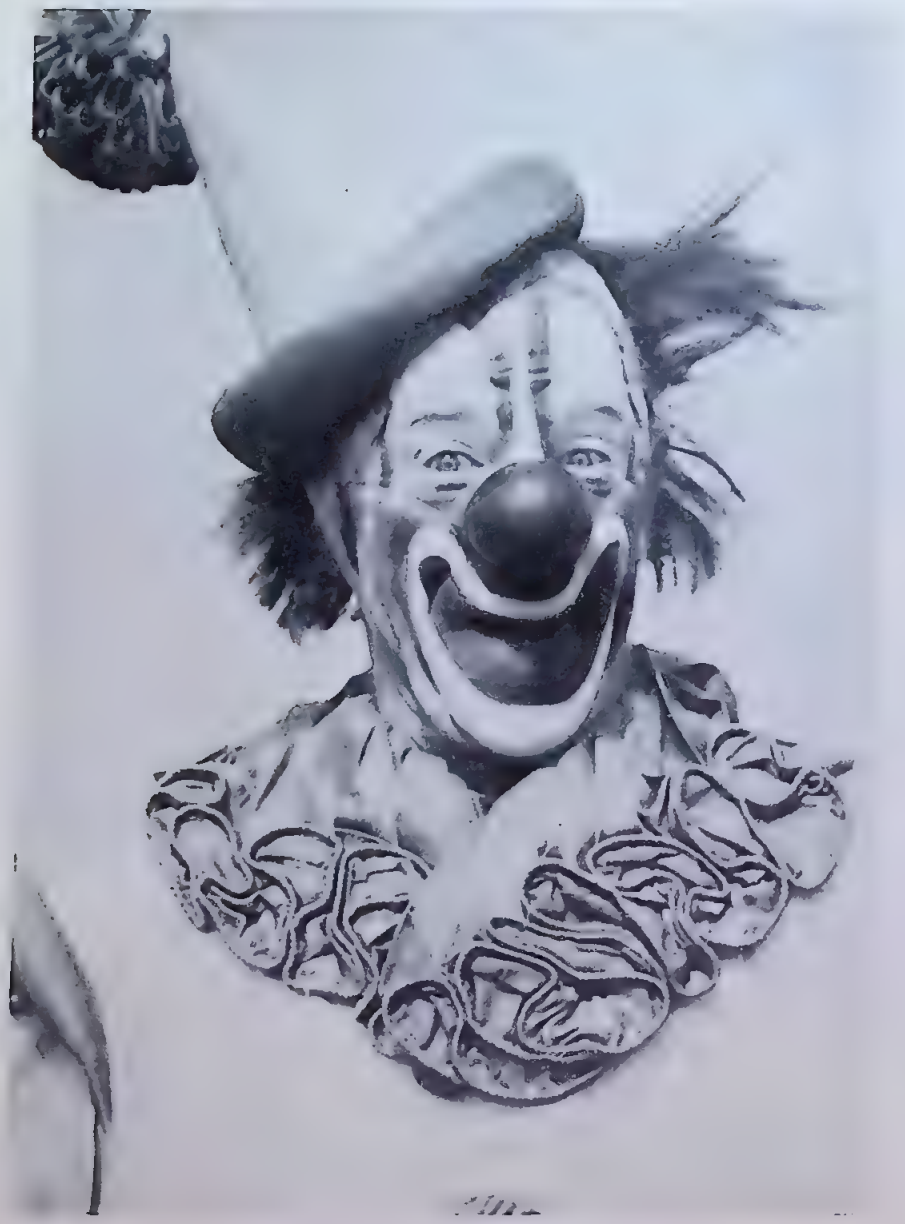


"Here come the elephants!" is always the cry when these huge, lumbering, friendly beasts appear. Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey have the greatest collection of elephants in the entire world. Forty to 50 are carried around to cities large and small for all of America to admire. Although it isn't their regular food, the herd eats more than a ton of peanuts every few weeks.

The circus has the finest and rarest transient collection of wild animals, rivaling the world's finest zoos. All the animals are kept in immaculate cages and are fed in the most meticulous manner. Humane societies and zoo directors the country over are amazed at the superb condition of the beautiful beasts. Animal wagons are covered while on the flat cars↑. A lioness← placidly gazes off into the distance.

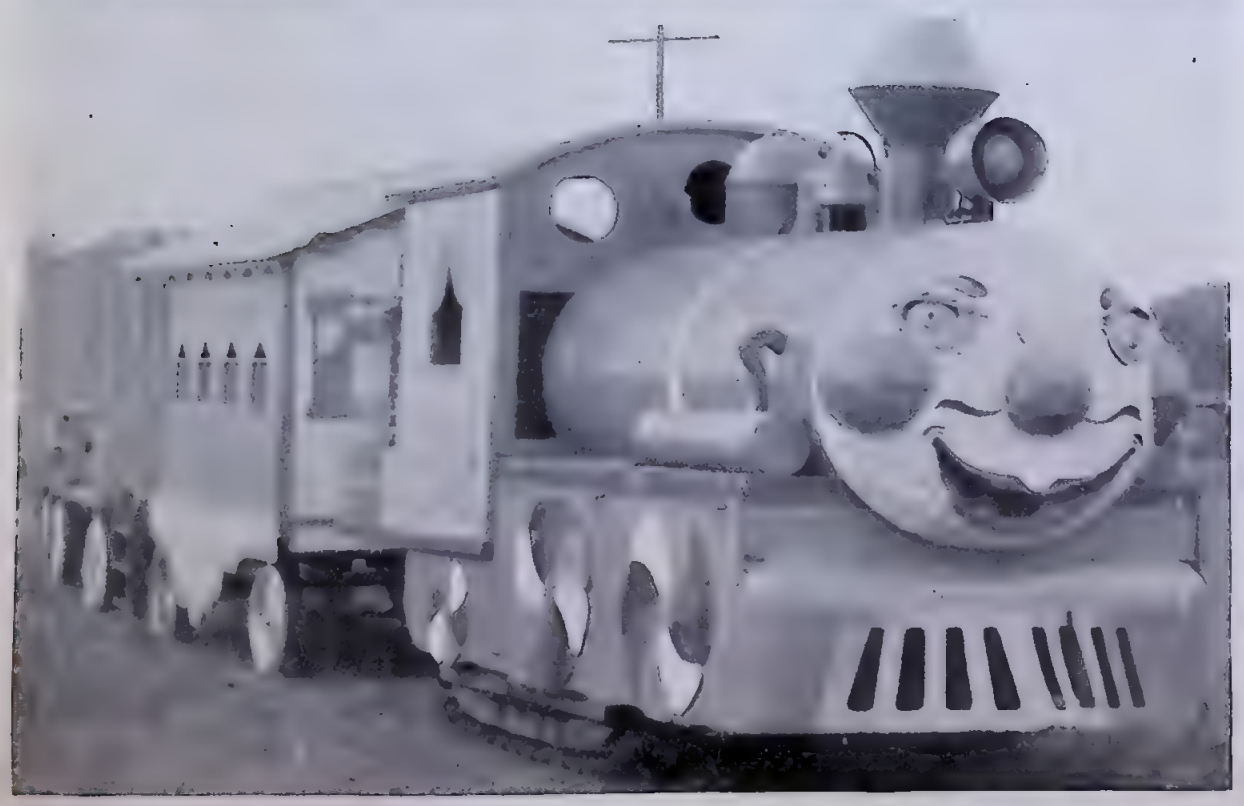


The circus menagerie has an astounding list of animals including two gorillas, three giraffes←, two hippopotamuses, a rhinoceros, tigers, leopards, lions, kangaroos, panthers, polar bears, seals, tapirs, chimpanzees, baboons, lively exotic birds, monkeys, and dozens of others, including full-grown pigmy African elephants↑ shown with an Indian elephant. A peanut beggar fashions a sunbonnet of hay→.



The bright red coaches carry all of the circus personnel, each of whom has a bunk compartment or stateroom in which to sleep. Special cars are set aside for workmen, single men, single girls, and married persons. Cars are home to these people, and are kept spotlessly clean. Porters are detailed for this work. Note mop and pails↗.

Cars are named after cities and states: "Wisconsin," the home state of Ringling Bros.; Connecticut," home state of Barnum; "Florida," winter quarters, are a few examples. Below is car 88, the "Los Angeles." Two performers stand in front of their home. Circus people are never seen in costume except in parades and performances.



After all the trains are unloaded and all paraphernalia and equipment is erected and in place, the matinee performance gets under way. Here is the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey "American Rocket." It goes through more cities and states than any other train in the United States, but never leaves the quarter-mile oval route which it travels twice every circus day.

Loading the first of the four circus trains begins after the evening meal, as soon as it is possible to pack up the commissary department. One of the cookhouse wagons is being pulled up the runway by a truck↑. Wagons are always loaded with a predetermined knowledge of the unloading conditions at the next town. Wagon 130 is equipped with a generator which supplies electricity to powerful lights needed for the loading operations at night. Most of the equipment is loaded in the dead of night, after the evening show is over. The locomotive→ slowly starts off with its heavy train on the way to another city.

Across the country go the circus trains. Here↑ three of the 70-foot-long stock cars, followed by a long string of flats, are reflected in the river. The caboose← trails behind a long string of performers' sleeping cars. It is the last we will see of the big circus until the next year.

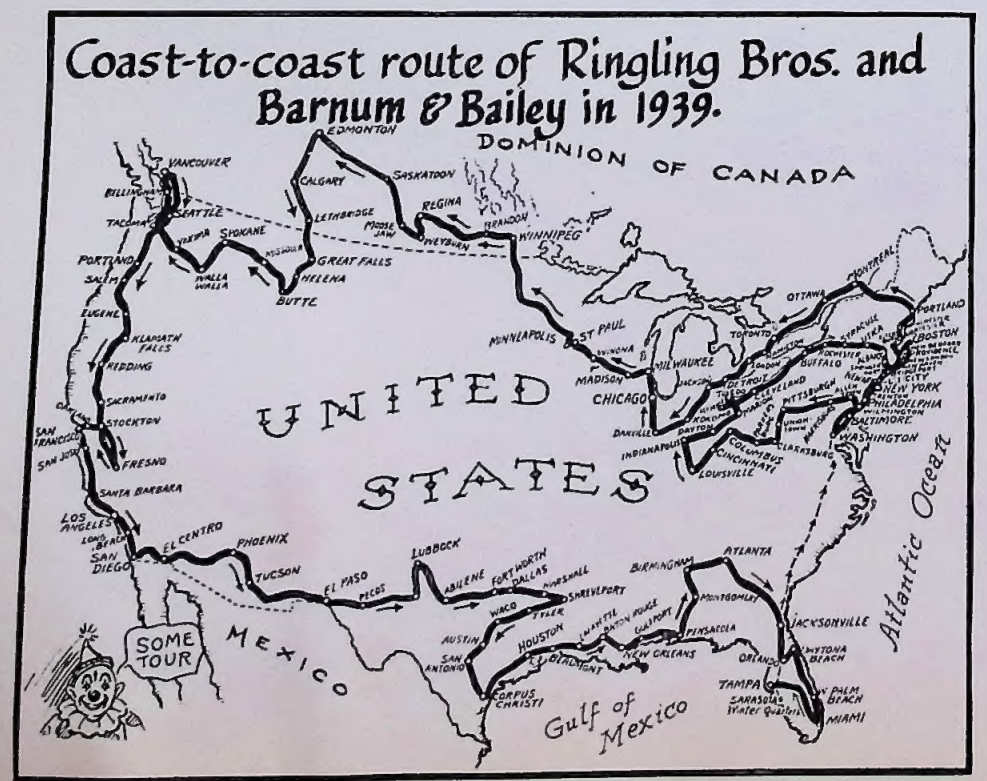
SEASON
1946
No. 8

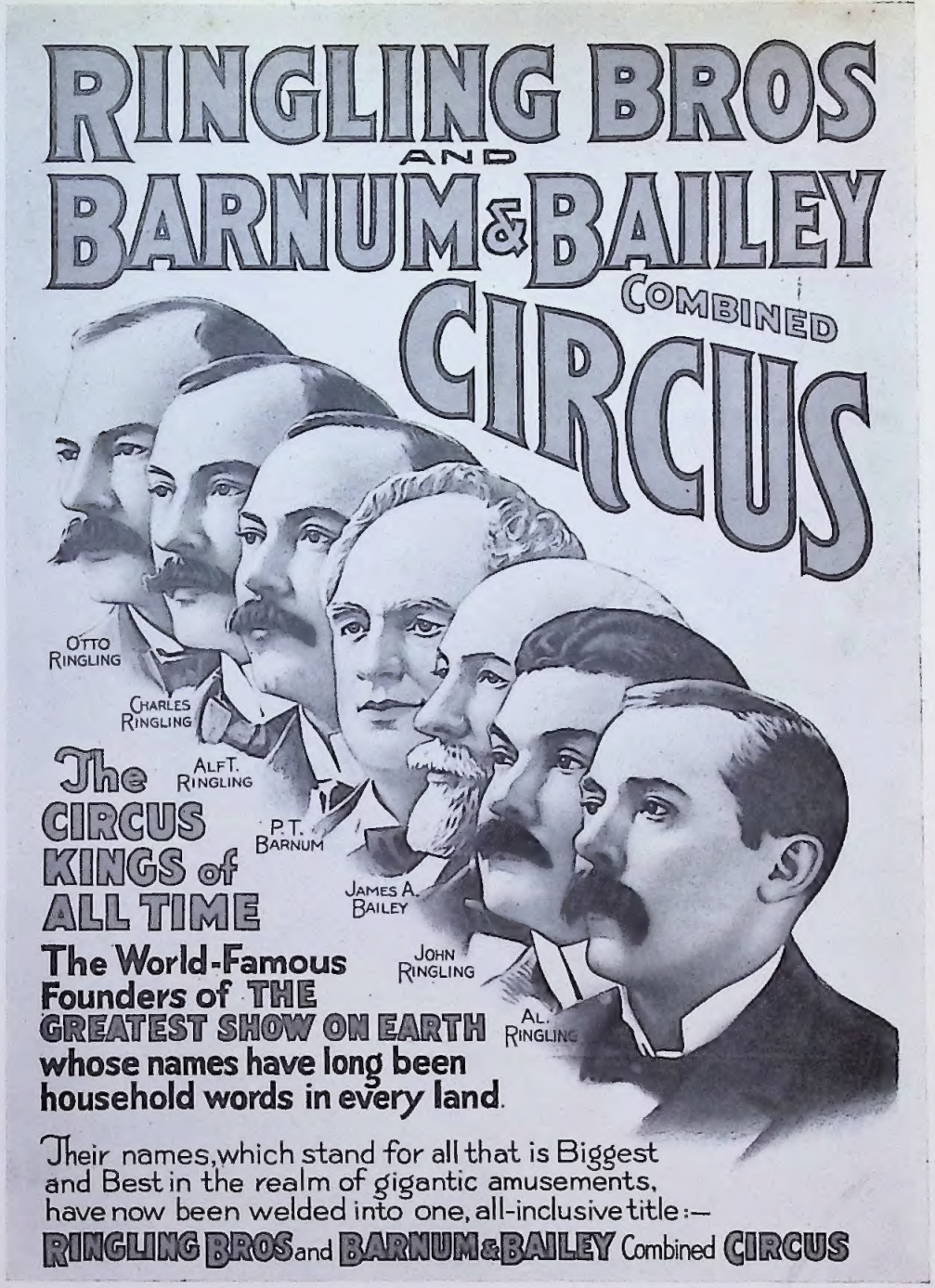
RINGLING BROS AND BARNUM & BAILEY COMBINED SHOWS

OFFICIAL TOUR

ALLOW MAIL ENOUGH TIME TO REACH POINTS NAMED BEFORE DATE GIVEN

DATE	TOWN	STATE	R.R.	MILES
	SUNDAY			
Sept. 2	SIOUX CITY	IOWA	I. C.	135
" 3	NORFOLK	NEBRASKA	CNW	72
" 4	OMAHA	"	"	121
" 5	"	"		
" 6	ST. JOSEPH	MISSOURI	M. P.	171
" 7	LAWRENCE	KANSAS	S. F.	114
	SUNDAY			
" 9	OKLAHOMA CITY	OKLAHOMA	SF—MKGT	320
" 10	"	"		
" 11	ENID	"	R. I.	88
" 12	PONCA CITY	"	"	59
" 13	WICHITA	KANSAS	S. F.	77
" 14	SALINA	"	M. P.	118
	SUNDAY			
" 16	KANSAS CITY	MISSOURI	SF—KCT	206
" 17	"	"		
" 18	"	"		
" 19	TOPEKA	KANSAS	S. F.	69
" 20	EMPORIA	"	"	61
" 21	INDEPENDENCE	"	"	117




RINGLING BROS AND BARNUM & BAILEY COMBINED CIRCUS
OTTO RINGLING
CHARLES RINGLING
ALF T. RINGLING
P. T. BARNUM
JAMES A. BAILEY
JOHN RINGLING
AL. RINGLING
The CIRCUS KINGS of ALL TIME
The World-Famous Founders of THE GREATEST SHOW ON EARTH whose names have long been household words in every land.
Their names, which stand for all that is Biggest and Best in the realm of gigantic amusements, have now been welded into one, all-inclusive title:—
RINGLING BROS and BARNUM & BAILEY Combined CIRCUS

Founders of "The Greatest Show on Earth."

A typical monthly route sheet↖. Map← shows coast-to-coast tour the circus made in 1939. In that year 17,117 miles were traveled and 383 performances were given in 124 cities in 27 states and six Canadian provinces. Thirty-nine railroad systems were used and the shortest run was from Minneapolis to St. Paul, only 10 miles. The longest run was made two days later from St. Paul to Winnipeg, 457 miles. For the 10-mile move the trains were all loaded exactly the same as if the distance to be traveled were 400 miles. The circus dare not vary its routine and chance the confusion and delays that might result.